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How Bloody was Mary?

Guess Lara Denim Romper - Blue - XS

Guess Soft Bandage V-Neck Top - Black - XS

Guess

BBC History Magazine Article - March 2006

Source: <http://mary-tudor.blogspot.com/> Date: 10/06/2016

Author: Mary Tudor Blogger (Mary Tudor Blogger)

How Bloody was Mary?

Is it fair to see the Tudor Queen as just a vicious persecutor?

PLUS SAN FRANCISCO QUAKE FARADAY'S SCIENCE CASTRATED STARS

On the 450th anniversary of the execution of the former Archbishop of Canterbury for his Protestant faith, DAVID LOADES reassesses the reign of Mary I, later dubbed 'bloody Mary' and asks if she fully deserves history's opprobrium

ON 21 MARCH 1556, a wet and miserable morning, the 66-year-old former Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, was burned alive in the town ditch of Oxford in front of Trinity College, in what is now Broad Street.

The event was dramatic: in every sense of the word, presided over by the mayor and attended by the kind of expectant crowd normal at public executions. Cranmer had been expected to recant, and particularly to retract his rejection of the physical presence of Christ in the eucharist (transubstantiation); indeed he had already signed several documents to that effect. However, when he was paraded in St Mary's Church (near All Souls College in the High Street) immediately prior to his execution to confirm his submission, he emotionally repudiated all such actions, and reaffirmed the Protestant faith by which he had lived for at least ten years.

His confessions were distraught: the magistrates outraged, and some of the spectators no doubt (secretly) exultant. What had looked like being a piece of rather sordid political theatre, was suddenly transformed into a glorious martyrdom. In a final dramatic gesture, the old man insisted on first consigning to the flames the hand which had signed his recantations.

The context of this act was the religious struggle usually called "the Reformation", in which the position and theology of the catholic church were challenged by new ideas arising originally from Martin Luther's protest of 1517. Cranmer had been the standard bearer of the English Reformation for over 20 years, and his death made him a symbol of faith and defiance. He had been Archbishop of Canterbury since 1533, and had guided Henry VIII (ruled 1509-47) through his rejection of the papacy, and the adoption of the English Bible. By the end of Henry's life he held explicitly Protestant views on such key issues as justification by faith alone and the Eucharistic presence.

At the beginning of Mary I's reign (she ruled 1553-58) he had explicitly rejected the re-adoption of the mass. By the law he

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BBC History March 2006

QUEEN

GLORIOUS MARTYRDOM

The burning of Cranmer from the Book of Martyrs.

Foxe wrote that Mary would in no wise relent from the death sentence.

Right: Cranmer in a painting after c1547

should not have died because, having been judicially convicted of heresy only once, in 1553, he had recanted. However, both Cardinal Pole and the Queen, particularly the latter, were determined to see him dead.

Pole was the son of Margaret, Countess of Salisbury, the daughter of George, Duke of Clarence, and consequently the great nephew of King Edward IV (1461-83). He had fallen out bitterly with Henry VIII over the latter's divorce, had written polemic against him, and been created cardinal in 1536. His family had been destroyed by Henry in revenge, and he had every reason to be bitter against the reformers.

The Book of Martyrs

Mary had reprieved Cranmer from the traitor's death to which he had been condemned in 1533 for endorsing Jane Grey's claim to the throne, because she believed his crimes against God to be more significant than his crimes against the state. His recantations, honestly obtained by his sister and unsuspecting Spanish friars, were a serious embarrassment, and when one appeared in print it was suppressed. "Of her purpose to burn him" as John Foxe sardonically observed, "she would in no wise relent." We are dependent upon Foxe, the author of the *Acts and Monuments* (Book of Martyrs) for many details of the persecution. His work was published in 1563 as a defence of the Elizabethan settlement (the 1559 Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity that set out the basis for Protestant England).

When Cranmer was brought to St Mary's Church, therefore, he had nothing to lose and everything to gain by his gesture. By so doing, of course, he gave a retrospective pretext to his executioners. Three days after the event the Venetian ambassador reported to his government: "On Saturday last, the

SEVERITY PERSONIFIED

Eworth's 16th-century portrait, thought to be of Mary I, reflects history's stern image of the Tudor Queen

March 2006 BBC History

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